

Ottawa River Institute (ORI) Directors' Report for 2018

Celebrate Our Rivers

ORI worked with the **Bonnechere River Watershed Project** (BRWP) and others to sponsor another successful “Celebrate Our Rivers” paddle series in 2018. Many partners are involved in this program, which includes events on the Ottawa, Madawaska, and Bonnechere Rivers. The ORI-led paddles featured some of our lesser-known waterways: the Little Mississippi, Snake, Muskrat, and Barron Rivers. We recently submitted a grant application to Mountain Equipment Coop to promote the 2019 paddle series and to include a natural history component for some paddles. The 2019 schedule features new paddles on Brennan’s Creek, White Lake, Conroy Marsh, the Ottawa River to Oiseau Rock, and the Ottawa River to the Gervais Caves area.

Renfrew County Stewardship Forum and Freshwater Partners Initiative

ORI was a co-organizer of the May 16, 2018 **Renfrew County Stewardship Forum**, with the theme “Our Freshwater, Our Future.” Participants spoke from a wide range of perspectives, from Aboriginal traditional knowledge (water is the “blood of Mother Earth”), through farming, lake property ownership, conservation authorities, fishing, hunting, protection of special natural areas, citizen science, and shoreline protection.

ORI is part of the Leadership Committee for the **Freshwater Partners Renfrew County** initiative, funded by the **Ontario Trillium Foundation** and led by BRWP. The Freshwater Partners initiative sponsored the 15th annual **Interlake Association** meeting on September 29, 2018 at the Royal Canadian Legion in Eganville, with active participation by ORI members. The Freshwater Partners initiative also sponsored the Renfrew County Stewardship Forum held April 16, 2019 at the Renfrew Legion with a theme of “One County, One Voice”. The Forum generated significant interest in formation of a permanent body to enable collaboration on water quality and quantity (e.g., flooding) issues in the County. BRWP and the **Renfrew County Stewardship Council** are leading follow-up action on this matter.

Other Water-Related Activities

ORI provided information for the Ottawa River Watershed Study led by Environment and Climate Change Canada. In October 2018 the department released its draft report (*An Examination of Values, Existing Data, Potential Indicators, and Governance in the Ottawa River Watershed*). ORI submitted comments, specifically regarding the possible formation of an Ottawa River Watershed council. The federal government has delayed its release of a final report. We will let members know about future developments.

ORI has contacted the County of Renfrew’s Development and Property Department regarding improved waterway signage on County highways. We have alerted the County about missing signs on bridges and culverts where highways cross over major rivers and creeks.

ORI has also contacted the County regarding the Heritage River status of the Ottawa River. The County produces an annual report on activities related to the designation, which can include events such as paddles in the Celebrate Our River series.

ORI continues to be active on the Science and Water Quality Committee of the **Muskrat Watershed Council**. The Council is doing excellent work, aided by the Pembroke Campus of **Algonquin College** and **Watersheds Canada**, and by various provincial departments. This work includes ongoing water quality monitoring, a 3-year tree planting project to establish waterway buffers in the watershed, and promotion of controlled tile drains on local farmlands.

Trails

Twice each year ORI convenes and chairs teleconferences of an informal Renfrew County Trails Association. The County of Renfrew owns the former K&P rail line (now the K P Trail, from Renfrew to Calabogie) and the former CP rail corridor (now the Algonquin Trail, from the boundary with Lanark County through Arnprior, Renfrew, Cobden, Pembroke and Petawawa to the boundary with Papineau-Cameron Township west of Deux Rivieres). The County manages these as multi-use trails for hikers, cyclists, snowmobilers and ATVers. The biannual meetings allow representatives of the County and various trail user groups to coordinate activities such as brushing and bridge maintenance, and to promote events such as the May 29, 2019 County Council Bike-And-Hike. This will take place on the new Algonquin Trail, starting at Algonquin College following Council's monthly meeting. Again this year June will be Active Transportation Month. The **Ottawa Valley Cycling and Active Transportation Alliance** will organize a number of activities – check out their website and get out and enjoy!

On April 10, 2019 ORI representatives met with staff at the Pembroke District Office of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry to discuss trail development on provincial crown lands. We will be considering a project at a specific location – stay tuned!

Bio-Blitzes

ORI works with the **Pembroke Area Field Naturalists** to organize an annual bio-blitz, during which participants identify plant and animal species found at a particular location. The 2018 bio-blitz took place on July 26th in partnership with the **Nature Conservancy of Canada** (NCC) on the NCC's 30-ha tract of Ottawa River shoreline known as the Gervais Caves Property, near Westmeath. This property features Canada's largest underwater cave system, with numerous sinkholes, abundant ferns, and large old cedars. In addition to species identification, participants helped the NCC remove invasive plants from the property.

Plans are in progress for the 2019 bioblitz to take place on the 31-ha Alexander Stewart Provincial Park, one of Renfrew County's 25 protected areas, with a hardwood forest of Maple, American Beech, Basswood and some less common species such as Blue-Beech and Bur Oak. We will let members know as soon as a date is chosen.

Thank You to Our Members and Supporters

In particular, we would like to acknowledge the generous donation made by the **Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada**. Thanks to all ORI members, supporters and partners as we completed our 17th year; from ORI Directors John Almstedt, Ole Hendrickson, Lynn Jones, Sandra Palmer, Craig Robinson, and Craig Trendell; and from ORI Coordinator Cheryl Keetch.